



Kilodney Does Shakespeare, and other stories
Lorette C. Luzajic

“Lorette, like Wonder Woman, is her own institution.”

Paul Robinson, Blog Critics

“Think Courtney Love meets Margaret Atwood.”

Donnarama, female impersonation artist

“Lorette’s writing made me feel embarrassed by everything I had ever written. If she were a man I probably would've punched her in the face. I would 've at least spread rumours about her that weren't true. Lorette was a blues record that I owned on CD.”

Iaian Greenson, artist

"Imaginative, witty, blessedly free of normal logic, surpnsmg, profound, very human, touching, sassy."

*Thomas Moore, bestselling author of *Care of the Soul*, *The Soul of Sex*, *Soul Males*, and more*

“All around· creative genius... Lorette, you are a superstar.”

*Ariel Gore, author of *How To Be a Famous Writer Before You're Dead*, *Atlas of the Human Heart*, *The Hip Mama Survival Guide*, and more.*

"This girl was born to write, and she writes as well as I do."

Crad Kilodney

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Kilodney Does Shakespeare, and other stories

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by Lorette C. Luzajic

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Please visit Crad Kilodney at cradkilodney.wordpress.com.

Please visit Stuart Ross at bloggamooga.blogspot.ca.

Please visit Matthew Firth at blackbilepress.com.

Please visit Richard Grayson at richardgrayson.com.

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by Lorette C. Luzajic



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2012



for Crad, of course

"How unbearable at times are people who are happy, people for whom everything works out."
Anton Chekhov



Kilodney Does Shakespeare, and other stories

"Just make up whatever you like," bellows legendary author Crad Kilodney. "It doesn't make any difference anyways. Go ahead, you have my full permission."

Well, that *does* sound like fun. Armed with my imagination and a stack of Kilodney's signature caustic diatribes on mutants, monkeys, and the putrid heart of ordinary man, I could definitely concoct something quite entertaining.

But it wouldn't be nearly as fascinating as the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me Crad.

My rigid insistence of sticking to the facts makes our interview sessions awkward. I want to find out more about Kilodney's latest masterpiece: his complete library of plays, *Shakespeare For White Trash*. I also want to revisit the work he's done in the past and get a feel for the impact he has had on the independent literary scene in Canada and beyond. Most of all, I want to find out more about his life and all that has happened in it. To get him to talk at all, I promise a stirring blend of fabrication and brave literary insights.

Other conditions apply: I must not use words like "postcolonial discourse" or "hegemony" or "poststructuralist" or "phenomenology of gesture:" Crad hates phony intellectuals, you see, even more than he hates imbeciles and vegetarians.

Mr. Kilodney, where do you get your ideas?

My ideas? ...I ... uh ... well ... I really don 't know how to answer that.

How long does it take you to write a book?

How long? ... well, I...I really couldn't say.

Which is your best book and your worst book?

Oh... uh... I... don't know... I...

How do you deal with rejection?

Rejection... I... uh ... I suppose I just... carry on.

Don't you think you would have done better if you had majored in English in college, instead of something useless like astronomy?

Well... I'll never know.

One critic described your writing as "an almost random assemblage of words and sentences, devoid of meaning and integrity." Is that true?

Oh... uh... I... I hope not.

Just kidding. The above interview is not from myself talking with Crad Kilodney, but from an interview he did with Ms. Agraka X. Pniu, editor of the *Knerpie Literary Review*.

The interview series, "*Extreme Writers*", was "sponsored by the Arts Council of Moose River and by Garbanzo Waste Disposal, according to a May 26, 2008 post on Crads blog called. "An Interview With Crad Kilodney."

For the uninitiated, Crad Kilodney, Duke of Sherbourne, is a fixture in cult circles of Canadian literary history. He's a master of the short story, but is more famous for his querulous nature and for his insistent plunging of the depths of human depravity. His annihilation of all pretense of good taste often erects barriers difficult for a wider audience to surmount. Yet this is also where his genius lies. Kilodney is the patron saint of the foul climes of Toronto street literature, the jewel in the heap, the hero of the slush pile, the king of the ill.

His misery is punishment, he says, for "vain literary pretensions" in his past life when he was a "rich idler." Now he has been forced into "a satire" of the life of a writer.

Those vain literary pretensions keep coming back to haunt him. Facing disillusionment and burnout, Crad disappeared some time ago from the cultural landscape, only to resurface out of the blue with a new blog and a series of obscene works on the German philosophers.

Then he had a better idea.

Kilodney woke up one day and decided he was going to rewrite Shakespeare.

All of it.

He would live Shakespeare, breathe Shakespeare, and maybe die Shakespeare- whatever it would take to rewrite the bard's entire library of plays.



It was a terrible mistake, truth be told, my first meeting with the Duke of Sherbourne. But it was done, and there I was, pen and notebook in hand, in his royal presence. For one thing, being there meant climbing up what seemed like a few hundred stairs. I was several decades the Duke's junior, at least, but I thought I was going to keel over and have a stroke.

It hadn't been my idea. An artist friend of mine, the brilliant Iaian Greenson, had suggested I do a story on the cantankerous writer who'd long ago resigned from Toronto's mean streets. Kilodney had spent nearly twenty years peddling self-published books like *Excrement*, *Terminal Ward*, and *Foul Pus From Dead Dogs*.

In his "final" interview with *Eye Weekly*, he had firmly declared, "I intend to disappear totally ... I will never publish another book- why should I? I've produced more literature than this country ever deserved."

Kilodney, who says he was once voted one of the "5000 best writers in Toronto," had long been a folk hero to the doomed literati of Canada. In addition to his own Charnel House imprint, he worked in vanity publishing warehouses and had a penchant for reviewing the worst in self-published literature.

He also wrote about perverts for men's magazines. His visible misery and willingness to brave Canada's cold to hawk his bent humour earned him cult status as a writer truly prepared to suffer for his art.

I had noticed him, of course, a thousand times in Toronto, my home city. I had in fact at some point purchased *Junior Brain Tumors in Action* for a few bucks. And my friend Iaian had long talked about Kilodney's work as if it were akin to Henry Miller's. While this showed the depth of Greenson's devotion, to be honest, it wasn't much of a selling point for me. Still, as a self-made writer/artist, I was curious about how the whole independent thing had turned out for Crad Kilodney.

The interview would be used to write about Crad in my brief-running *Idea Museum* online arts magazine. Eventually, it became a story for *Book Slut*. I also featured Crad in my book, *Fascinating Writers*, drawing from those first encounters.

That introductory meeting was brutal. It was a gross misstep to mention my thoughts on Miller. Live and learn: insulting a writer's idol is not the way into his heart. "Miller is a man's writer, to be sure," Kilodney remarked tersely after my gaffe. I got the feeling he was using great restraint.

The evening after that mainly revolved around brittle and awkward silences. Crad told me he'd endured enough agony and stupidity on the streets and had gone into investing instead, following mining stocks and shuffling money around. He hobnobbed at stock conventions, wearing a suit. It was a chance for occasional interaction, he said, where he belonged, "with other ambitious, intelligent people."

Crad smoked his pipe while I scribbled in my notebook. He had handrolled several Export Greens for me. He was a gracious host, prepared with a tea selection from Dollarama, sugar-free Jell-o desserts, and even some mouthwashy mint liqueur. It was quite possibly the only kind of alcohol I'd never tried. The cigarettes reflected hospitality, so I took them.

"I love smoke," he barked when I asked if he found the atmosphere stuffy from the cigars. It was a small space with only one tiny window. Certain I'd lose his respect if I told him I had long ago quit smoking, I lit up and exhaled. He'd already said prior to our encounter that he would be "very

disappointed" if I was a vegetarian, since he intended to serve only "normal food" for snacks. I'd been truthfully able to tell him I did some "meat writing" for the Paleo diet blogosphere. This helped negate the Miller demerit points.

I didn't know that I was already home free, regardless of numerous unforgivable faux pas. Crad had read my work before my visit. Though it was definitely woman's work, there was a kinship in our twisted comic sensibilities, in our do-it-yourselfish worldviews. He admired my pluck. he told me later, to say anything fearlessly in front of the elites, and to not take rejection for an answer.

"Some of it's not even that bad," he said.

My ambition to live on fumes just so I could write and paint was no doubt more impressive to him than any of my sentimental poems. But I gladly accepted any hint of accolade.

And so, after an hour or more of excruciating silences, tempered only by strains of Debussy, the atmosphere shifted unexpectedly into near joviality. I was gifted with several autographed copies of his out-of-print hooks.

It was a privilege, I knew, to hold these Charnel House originals in my hands. The books are now collector's items. Some titles sell for sixty bucks a pop or more on eBay or Abebooks. Some are held in archives at the University of Princeton Library or Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

It wasn't too long before I looked up from a short story called "The Extremely Sane Postal Workers of Yellowknife," thinking, wow, does this guy know Miller's got nothing on him? He's better than Miller. Hell, after "The Man Who Died of His Opinions," "Don't You Know "Who This Is?" "Selected Potatoes," and the "World's Dullest Story," I thought, *Miller Shmiller*. Everyone's better than Miller. But this guy, this Duke of Sherbourne? He was damn well better than Shakespeare.



Biographically speaking, little is known about Crad Kilodney. Even his closest friends know little about him personally, and friends are few and far between.

"I don't really get along well with other people, I've got to be honest," Crad told me. "I'm too set in my ways. I am not going to do anything to make an effort."

It had always been that way, apparently, "I had fifteen roommates In college, and all of them disliked me, I can't say I blame them..."

During those first interviews for *Book Slut* several years ago, and in sessions this year preparing this book and its excerpt for *Sublime Rush* Magazine, I tried to ferret out some background, get a few details about the man behind the mask. But Kilodney really would prefer it if I just made things up, exactly like he said. He is not interested in providing a window for his readers to look through.

In person, he is a man of few words, often giving "yes" or "no" or hurling a few frustrated expletives into the air. "No comment" is a favoured fallback. When I remark on this, he conveniently throws Shakespeare at me. "Brevity is the soul of wit."

Crad's willing to talk about his work, to me, or to anyone. But any personal details, however mundane, he "trusts will be off the record."

The most personal morsel on Crad's Wikipedia page is that he was born in Jamaica, New York, in 1948. ("The first and oldest supermarket in the world is located in Jamaica, New York, did you know that?")

"Born" is also open to interpretation. "I was reincarnated onto this plane. I was an arrogant aristocrat, which explains why I'm still an aristocrat today. I was sent here to fulfill my literary fate, which I did not do in previous incarnations. I was promised a very unique literary career, but I was going to have to suffer for it. I also got stuck with a family who can't possibly understand me."

I asked if the Duke's interest in aliens and UFOs coincide with his reincarnation convictions. Is he an alien from an advanced species? "No." Well, it was a stupid question. But you never know.

Crad's heritage is Greek, which should meet with his approval as the foundation of western culture. Its contributions to politics, philosophy, athletics, aesthetics, science, and art and literature, do give the ethnicity rank as "one of the only worthwhile civilizations in history." But the Duke's family was apparently an exception to the rule. Still, any unpleasant adjectives used to describe them are explicitly "off the record."

Well, as Tolstoy wrote, "every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Crad does exhibit some softness around the edges when he speaks about them. But clearly, he does not feel a strong familial connection. He warns me against "concluding that I'm the victim of a 'bad childhood.'" This particularly family scenario was "a necessary manifestation of my reincarnation, crucial to the plot and its unfolding."

There are giant gaps between being reincarnated as an American baby whose name is known by few, then studying astronomy at the prestigious University of Michigan, and then suddenly becoming a famous Canadian named Crad Kilodney.

The Duke asserts that Crad is indeed his "real" name, the name that "came to me out of nowhere" and replaced the pseudonym he'd been born to.

When asked why he came to Toronto, Canada, Crad replied, ever expansive, "It was my fate."

Before coming to Ontario, Crad worked at various odd jobs like the one at Exposition Press. This now defunct vanity publishing house was once located in Hicksville, New York. This must have been fate, too. Most writers are inspired by famous authors, whether Hunter S. Thompson or Ezra Pound or Arthur Miller. But Crad would take his inspiration from the lowest of the low. Thus began his long reign over the slush piles of this world.

As we know, Crad became a staple of the streets of Toronto, working tirelessly on writing and selling some thirty books, until his temporary retirement.

There were no wives. There were no little Crads.

There were some special relationships, however, including rumours of a sordid and tragic romance. Kilodney seldom speaks about love or about women in person, but his books offer surprising sentimentality toward these girlfriends of yesteryear. Such moments in his writing are lonely, tender, sincere, almost wistful.

Crad has lived in this very same attic for decades now and this is where he plans to be found when the roll is called up yonder. He hates going out, except to the Internet lounge and occasionally to a Swiss Chalet or antiquarian bookseller. He works on his investments and writes day and night. On rare occasions, he has a visitor. He has a pen pal in prison, an act of charity toward the criminal class that takes me by surprise. The prisoner is a fan, a reader from way back, and they've kept in touch.

What else? Not much. There's a bumper sticker on Crad's wall that says, "Die Screaming." Next to two postcards of the queen. Crad likes ribs, burgers, meat loaf from his well-worn Fanny Fanner cookbook, potatoes, coleslaw, and sherbet. He hates alcohol. He likes any kind of tobacco. "Tobacco helps people write better."

He is very fond of his dentist.

He likes reading history and classics. He loves classical music, but ever full of surprises, he replies "David Bowie" when I ask who his favourite musician is.

He also likes Iggy Pop, the Birds, the Stones, opera, and Marianne Faithfull. Marianne Faithfull may be the epitome of womanhood in Kilodney's mind. Except for the drugs, of course, and the feminism. Whether this admiration is because she acted on stage in an Anton Chekhov play, or because she is related to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, of "masochism" fame, I do not ask.

Crad also loves television, which he claims is the best cure for depression. Whether intellectually stimulating documentaries about art or junky horrors about giant spiders taking over the earth, into each day some television must fall. He also watches programs featuring alien abductees or UFO sightings, to decide for himself who is lying and who is telling the truth.

I was certain that the answers to the mystery of Crad Kilodney would be found in an anagram. Perhaps something to do with the word "donkey." So I ran the name through an anagram solver on my computer.

Turns out, we have a number of competitive options, all of which double nicely as names for garage bands. Take your pick: *Darkly Coined*, *Ace Dinky Lord*, *Ironclad Dyke*, or *Cranked Doily*.

The truth is out there.



Can I confess to finding Shakespeare tedious and dull, and still call myself a writer? Of course I laud him as a significant bulwark of civilization, a creative superpower, a master of the English phrase. But I would be a liar if I said you that you'd find his complete works lodged in between my Dave Eggers and my Haruki Murakamis.

Crikey, now having gotten up to look, I see I have a lonely second-hand copy of *Macbeth* to salvage me from the hall of shame. There must be something, too, in my *Norton's*. There's a handbook I'd long forgotten about, nabbed from the free advance uncorrected proof box at the bookstore where I worked years ago. It gives a bit of background for each play, with helpful history and themes and definitions and whatnot. Now I recall choosing it with the intention of using it. I'd meant to study Shakespeare, but never did. (Not outside of *Julius Caesar* and the *Taming of the Shrew* in school, in any event.)

Without these few exceptions, my shelves are bereft of Shakespeare. There's a red sticker on the cover of *Macbeth*. I look closer. It reads, *five for a dollar*.

Let me defend myself by saying that there are many literary temptations, and that I can truthfully claim to have read more books than anyone I know. "Time to read" was actually one of the reasons I chose not to have children. But this is still, admittedly, a lazy excuse when I have found time for dozens of non-contenders such as *Life* and *Style Magazine*.

"Shakespeare is probably the writer that most high-art advocates would select as a universally acclaimed genius," writes beekeeper and Oxford lit prof John Carey. It is Shakespeare's reputation that allegedly, "proves that there are indeed artistic values that surmount place and time."

Carey writes this in his book, *What Good Are the Arts?* It's a splendid reflection, a frank discussion about arbiters of taste and whether quality in art can be trustily measured. " ... Even here the consensus argument breaks down ... even among the intelligent and educated across the centuries there has never, in fact, been consensus about Shakespeare's greatness."

George Bernard Shaw thought the adulation Shakespeare received was unfounded. He sneeringly called it "bardolatry." Carey also quotes Norbert Elias who quotes from 1780, Frederick the Great, in *On German Literature*: The "whole audience goes in raptures when it listens to these ridiculous farces worthy of the savages of Canada ... How can such a jumble of lowliness and grandeur, buffoonery and tragedy, be touching and pleasing?"

Carey also says that Charles Darwin found the bard "so intolerably dull that it nauseated me."

I suspect Darwin would be quite interested in Mr. Kilodney, as a scientific specimen of sorts, of absolute uniqueness in evolution. He could scrutinize the man to perhaps make sense out of our most base and pedestrian questions him: Where did he come from? Was he really a reincarnate from previous aristocracy? Who and how does he love? Has he ever been able to make little upturns with his mouth at the corner of his lips?

But more importantly, it would be hard for Darwin, for anyone, to find Mr. Kilodney "intolerably dull." To open at random any of his texts means sentence after perfect sentence, phrase after succinct, exquisite phrase. The words are abhorrent, the themes guttural and disturbed, and every note thrills with twisted, comic wit. Crad Kilodney speaks the unspeakable. This fearless honesty is partly what makes him a brilliant, important writer.

Kilodney does not share Darwin's disinterest in the great playwright. He tells me, "Nothing in Shakespeare is boring." He has completed rewriting twenty-five of the over thirty-five plays, including *King Lear*, *The Tempest*, *King John*, *Richard the Second*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Othello*. He hopes a publisher will take on the complete works when he is done, and has also started writing to drama departments in hopes they would like to stage his scurrilous versions of William's timeless masterpieces.

For now, the Duke runs the plays on his blog, cradkilodney.wordpress.com. The blog is loaded with treasure, but it requires digging around to get at. There's not much assistance to readers there, no titles or categories to lure them to the gold. The blog desperately needs a revised table of contents and links and other vital conveniences that technology affords readers. But for Kilodney, who has been writing in longhand on paper for around half a century, beginning to transition to the online universe is feat enough for today.

What's it like, to retire quite decidedly, to be sure your greatest work has already been written, to turn to newer, more solitary, more lucrative wonders, and then, to arise, like it or not, out of the past and face suddenly that fifty years of creative work was mere practice for your greatest feats?

How does it feel to wake up as an ever-more-obscure cult figure, a relic, facing old age, facing oblivion, and suddenly be facing your own resurrection- knowing the best is yet to come?

'Taking on Shakespeare is a ballsy challenge. Taking on the prodigious library is nearly superhuman. And aside from all this, Kilodney has reneged on his vow that he was through offering us his labours. From here on in, we can all expect more, more, and more.

"I have enough ideas in my file to keep me going past the age of a hundred," Crad grumbles. Such inspiration is evidently an irritating misfortune. For now, he is working at a furious dip to keep up with his muse. He says the Shakespeare project is hands-down his most important work to date.

Each play includes a helpful synopsis, or "Gist of the Story." Then Kilodney demonstrates his knack for making anything hysterically funny. This is a real gift, considering he has not yet embarked on the comedies.

"I got warmed up on the romances and tragedies, the most famous works, since they were a bit more familiar as popular pillars of culture. Like anything else, reading Shakespeare is just a matter of practice, and after a few, it begins to feel more natural. I expected the history plays to be the most work and wanted to have a good grasp before plunging in; I also wanted to give myself enough time and space to immerse myself and learn the broader history of what incidents were being dramatized. "

The spurious intellectual might find it incongruous for a writer of literary pulp fiction to take on the work of the man commonly acclaimed as the greatest writer in history. But others will get it right away- not, *why Crad?* but, *of course, who else?*

Shakespeare did not intend immortality and preeminence for his work; he did not have in mind the highbrow elites or the academicians. As Carey points out, Shakespeare made no effort to preserve corrected proofs of his work- its value was of immediate entertainment, its aim was merely to occupy

and entertain the unwashed masses. Certainly, he yearned for recognition as all artists must, but he was of the people, not of the sequestered hallways of academia.

Shakespeare's sonnets today are widely perceived as a profound meditation on love, sex, and death- but for their time, they were also bawdy paeans to lust. Today some southern states are making fools out of themselves for attempting to censor *The Tempest* from classrooms, citing obscene content. This is farcical, yes, but yet they are not far off the mark.

No obscenity should be censored, but Shakespeare *is* "obscene." His work was, ahem, frank, for its time, sonnets included. We must keep in mind that Shakespeare was writing to sell tickets to the theatre, not to impress professors of Comparative Discourse on the Aesthetic Phenomenologies of Ironic Referential pre-Postmodernism in the Pedagogy of Cinematic Allusions. His audience was more often than not hungry, illiterate, and plagued by the plague. A little bit of escapism was in order.

Hence, Shakespeare was soap operatic, preoccupied with sexual innuendos and double entendres that often referenced the genitalia. It was sometimes churlish toilet humour that sounds lofty to us today because of the old English.

Certainly, the malapropisms were witty and clever, but common nonetheless. Shakespeare's plays were filled with betrayal and slaughter and madness and incest and sex and war and vengeance and bastard children and brothels. His work was politically incorrect: bawdy, plebeian, ribald, fantastical, filthy, and funny.

In short, it was pure Kilodney.



Commenting online, high school teacher Pauline Kiernan summarizes all the critical work on Shakespeare, noting that his "astonishing genius lies in his supreme understanding of the human condition." And as with his audience, this human condition is rarely the sublime, divine, noble pinnacle for which we supposedly strive. Rather, it is the cesspool of mediocrity and worse, exactly what Kilodney, too, so astutely captures. The Duke's story, *I Chewed Mrs. Ewing's Raw Guts*, is worth considering in this light.

The title tells you where the story is going straight off the bat.

This particular tale is an anatomy of the revenge fantasy. It is a blow-by-blow depiction of how a person's fortress of politesse, his facade of civility, dissipates to reveal our savage heritage.

It is the edge where Everyman allows that fantasy to go beyond what is normally deemed permissible. The story is about this edge, this breaking point, the point where we turn from civilized man back into primal brute.

It is about how a human being can be driven to madness by another.

The story chronicles the details that lead our ordinary man to this point of no return. Tormented, frustrated, humiliated in increments by his landlady, our narrator makes one concession after another to appease her. Every appeasement brings him one step closer to the brink, to complete emotional erosion. Cracks in his sanity appear and our narrator's landlady begins to take on monstrous proportions.

The invasive character of a selfish old woman who hides behind virtue slowly turns our humble tenant into a beast. This tale goes full throttle into the jugular of human depravity, and now it is *we* who are *he*. We hate with him, we too are eroded into an exposed jumble of our basest instincts. The character ceases to be separate from ourselves. The beast is our own reflection.

"There comes a moment in the life of every sensitive, civilized, thinking individual when he is filled with rage at the realization that he is completely at the mercy of ignorant, malicious monsters," the story opens.

And it begins pleasantly enough. "My introduction to Mrs. Ewing was entirely satisfactory," the tenant explains.

But all is not as it seems.

"Like an insidious cancer that is first removed by surgery and then waits to spring up anew elsewhere in the body, the lingering effects of Mrs. Ewing returned to haunt my dreams as well as my waking moments. I had been bullied. I had been demoralized, harassed, made physically sick, and driven to the deepest depths of depression, and, above all, defeated.... Could I for once commit an act of self-assertion that would rid me of this anger, that would make up for all the injustices of a lifetime?"

"And so one night," our antihero tells us, "as the first winter wind howled through the cold steel-bitch thighs of the hookers across the street from my tiny attic apartment, I vowed that I would go back and murder Mrs. Ewing."

Now we live vicariously through another: we thrill to access our own savagery while our narrator goes through with what we all occasionally dream of but probably will never fulfill. The catharsis gives us access to these secret, profound longings. Then, we can wash our hands of them by claiming it as fiction. It is about *him*, not about us.

But our "fictional" tenant friend puts into chilling words what we already know in the pit of ourselves. "Reader, it was all too easy," he confesses. "And so in one moment I gained an insight that others take years to acquire: the mind is the main impediment to crime; crime itself is easy to commit."



I ask Crad if Shakespeare's work influenced his own, however indirectly. That's when he tells me that he had never studied Shakespeare before. He was going in blind. This is how he does things: he learns them on his own. "One degree is enough 'formal education' for anyone. Saves you from getting brainwashed. Study everything else on your own."

The project began with a clean slate, and "It's more work than I ever dreamed it would be." He says it takes some commitment to get past the old English into the heart and history, "even for smart people" like himself.

Kilodney doesn't use many flowery adjectives when describing his current scholarship. He says the secret of the bard's lasting legacy is simple. "Shakespeare knew a great story line when he saw one." However, "occasionally, he's too verbose." The bard also "has errors of consistency and other little mistakes. He evidently didn't give his best drafts to his publishers."

Crad Kilodney enjoys reading history books to stay current on the past. The surprising fun of this series, he discovered, was getting so immersed in history. One of his favourite translations so far has been *Richard the Third*. It was about a lot of "complex politics during the conclusion of the wars of the roses between the Yorks and the Lancasters." Although he hadn't anticipated just how huge the volume of work this project would be, just how much he was getting into, becoming absorbed in the historical areas in which he was unfamiliar "has been immensely edifying."

"If I wanted to know about something, I read about it," Crad tells me about his independent learning credo. "When I was young, I wanted to be culturally literate," he said, "I wanted to know things. Everything. So I began listening to symphonies and reading about composers, learning how to listen to classical music. And also reading about history, learning about art history."

As previously mentioned, Crad's formal university education is in science. from the University of Michigan, commonly acclaimed as one of the world's top universities. He was barely twenty years old when he finished, missing another famous independent thinker, Madonna, who would study on a dance scholarship a few years after he graduated.

But as cerebral as his studies were, Crad's *informal* education is far more intense and spans fifteen times as many years. It runs the gamut from the Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars* page-turner he's got on the go right now, to modern classical music to chess to the "critical study" of b-horror flicks like *The Creeping Terror*.

The latter was an insufferably dull expenditure of two hours of my life, wasted at the behest of Kilodney who promised me the worst cinematic experience I would ever endure. This is the type of ringing endorsement I simply can't turn down. Thus, I treated myself to the Duke's favourite monster, which he warned me looked like "a few people moving under a dusty old rug."

In truth. it was easier going than Thucydides, but only by a slight margin.

I'd read in one of Stuart Ross's books that Ross, another maven of the small press and author of over thirty-five titles, played chess with Crad on Sundays, back in the day. "Crad was a mediocre chess player, and better than me," Stuart wrote to me when I contacted him for this story.

He said they enjoyed looking up chess masters since most of them were "batshit crazy."

My own chess skills are nothing to write home about, but I can hold my own with other competent beginners. So I suggest a friendly game or two with Crad.

Crad says he hasn't played for at least ten years, maybe more. So I look forward to some casual banter, maybe relaxing enough to get talking, hear some in-depth personal proclamations about his past life as an alien that has never before been revealed to Kilodney's audience.

But as it turns out, there is no time for conversation. Once the board comes out, the Duke takes me down, ruthlessly, in a few moves flat. And then he does it again.

After a handful of ten second games, I'm humiliated and suggest we put the game away.

"I played with friends quite a bit a long time ago," Crad says wistfully. "After that, I played alone. I played until I kept beating the computer. And then there was no point playing anymore, was there?"

I chatter nervously about. personal enrichment, moving from the chess to the vinyl collection, which features mainly symphony or baroque or classical records I haven't even heard of. The Tchaikovsky is sort of solid ground for me, since his work was part of the inspiration for the work of Michael Jackson, one of my musical idols. I'd also seen the film *Amadeus* enough times to recognize and love Mozart. But Crad's collection is no overview of classical music's greatest hits. It's extensive, and features records by the dozen, a sophisticated collection by anyone's standards. Rachmaninoff: Dvorak, Khachaturian, Verdi, Vivaldi, Ravel, Schönber, Bartok.

He puts a few records on for me, highlighting certain parts, asking me to listen to the dissonance in some experimental works.

While we're spinning something quite interesting from the early 1900s, *The Wasps* by Ralph Vaughan Williams, I ask Crad how the idea came about to do the entire Shakespeare library. Why didn't he choose just to do his favourite play? Why would anyone slavishly devote himself to a behemoth of a task like this when they were not at least already familiar with the works?

"Because I want to be fucking famous, do you mind?"

Perhaps Shakespeare *will* ensure that Kilodney survives. *Simple Stories for Idiots* or *World Under Anaesthesia* may never garner the acclaim they deserve, and those who have never discovered Kilodney may never Google, "What the Arrival of New York State Onions Meant to Me," and get to the gold. But people will always be looking for Shakespeare, and they could stumble into Kilodney's glorious underworld this way.

I gush about the series ushering in a "Kilodney revival," a "renaissance," a "great resurrection from the obscurity of this garret," but Crad isn't so sure.

"No one gives a shit," he says. He has sent announcements out to theatres and English department professors and other "dullards" who have forgotten he's alive, or never heard of him at all. "There's just no audience," Crad grumbles. "It's the end of civilization, the end of the world."

Actually, there is more audience today for any kind of art or pass time than ever before in human history and more ways to find and reach that audience from and to any corner of the world. But I'm not about to launch into the potential or viral marketing and the joys of web technology, not when both of us are running up that proverbial hill, too old to figure that shit out and make it really work. Too old to rock and roll, too young to die.

I also resist pointing out that Crad's biggest barrier is and always has been his sour attitude, not his talents, which are considerable. It is not news to him that he is consistently described as cantankerous, curmudgeonly, cranky, surly, irascible, and even obnoxious. Such adjectives make it into everything that has ever been written about him, this piece included. The word "misanthrope" is frequently uttered, with affection but also with bewilderment, from his alienated but loyal audience. It's a word Crad uses himself.

The idea that the world owes one something is a particularly unbecoming quality. And that's why a number of authorities and quite a few fans have pointed out that Crad might have done better out there on the streets, too, if he had not berated every passer by for his or her intellectual paucity. Crad's books also frequently contained murderous rants toward the public, hardly an invitation to further purchasing. Would a more welcoming facade have been a better bet? Would it now?

There's a recollection on the topic that I like a lot, by a Canadian blogger in Greece named Thomas. He said that years ago, Crad "would complain about how bad business was and gape stupidly at passers-by who ignored him." A teenager walked by and Crad droned rudely "get your hockey books."

Once the kid had passed by, Thomas tried to patiently explain to Crad that 'with such an attitude, it was unlikely the boy would mention him or his books to his friends, And Crad replied, "Are you kidding? He's forgotten me already."

With *The Wasps* buzzing away in the background, I decide to ask Crad what he thinks about these barriers, Against my better judgment. "You have a reputation as something of a curmudgeon." I venture. "Does this bother you, or was it an image that you cultivated?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," the Duke says bitterly. He pushes a few worn copies of Shakespeare's plays across the table at me. It's two I've never heard of- *King John* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

"Go home and do your homework," he says. The interview is over.



In my mind, the misunderstood writer is an archetype, not a stereotype.

Widely disdained as an excuse among those writers who have met with some success, it is nonetheless a staple among both writers and readers. Successful or otherwise.

The misunderstood writer suffers for his art without recognition from a disinterested or intellectually incapable public. Writers are often guilty of romanticizing this archetype because it provides a sliver of redemption for us. We don't have to confront the terrifying possibility that our work is garbage if we can blame our failures on the masses and their inferior minds.

It also gives us succour to suppose ourselves kin to other misunderstood geniuses. After all, Nabakov's *Lolita* was rejected as "overwhelmingly nauseating" and Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* prompted a rejection slip proclaiming, "I haven't really the foggiest idea about what the man is trying to say."

Rudyard Kipling was told, "You just don't know how to use the English language." Some thirty publishers felt Stephen King's *Carrie* would never sell. Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* was called "unsaleable and unpublishable." F. Scott Fitzgerald heard, "You'd have a decent book if you'd get rid of that Gatsby character." C.S. Lewis, Dr. Seuss, Colette, Margaret Mitchell, James Joyce, Louis L'Amour, Ernest Hemingway- brilliant writers from every genre were rejected over and over.

Hell, Henry Miller's *Black Spring* was rejected by one Bennett A. Cerf of Random House: "I admire your talent for writing, but I didn't like this particular book at all. In my opinion, it doesn't have the faintest chance of achieving commercial success in America."

With this long list of flubs, any writer can console himself with the obvious- if the most educated and experienced literary tastemakers can't distinguish true talents, then *we* might also be misunderstood virtuosos on sheer account of our going nowhere.

And if the literary aristocrats cannot discern true art, how then can the hoi polloi be expected to recognize our erudite mastery?

Even if a writer understands with his head that it is simply not rational to demand that perfect strangers drop everything to find out who you are and buy what you're selling, that can't change the fact that the very nature and purpose of a writer's or artist's work is *to be seen*. Even if said writer is resolved to appropriate humility, even if said artist has no illusions about their place in the food chain, to lack a readership or attract a meagre one is to be erased. If no one reads my work, then I am talking to myself

Validation depends more than superficially on having an audience. The vast majority of artists don't do it for the money, since those who aren't delusional know there usually isn't much, if any. They are driven, thus, to make art for the sake of art, and the natural impulse is to show that work to others. Art's *purpose* is to be shared.

The smart ones accept the subjectivity of art. These rare birds are perceptive enough to see that: if the brilliant and the bumpkin alike sometimes like Cormac McCarthy or Emily Dickinson and sometimes do not; or if they themselves think too much is made of Tolstoy and not enough of John Gould, then there is no need to expect all people, bright or stupid, to like them. They don't *need* to be liked- they are not neurotic, and their worth does not depend on social supports of any kind. They write for themselves, let the chips fall where they may.

These ones work hard to maintain a realistic notion of their place in the literary landscape, while always striving to improve their craft. For its own sake.

I try to be one of the smart ones. But that which the head knows is seldom adopted by the heart. Plus, this model is kind of indulgent: if one spends one's whole life typing out words that no one need read, well, then I'm hardly working. Then I'm not contributing to society.

We would pack it in if we could, I think- good God, I would love to write instead for fun, penning an occasional rhyme for the church bulletin or annual family Christmas newsletter. To spend my days in

stability as a plumber or secretary! Oh, to have an ordinary life with all of the attendant securities. Oh, to not think the whole universe hinges on some short story I'm working on. Because it doesn't.

The least neurotic and best-adjusted people don't put too much store in the approval of others. They know full well that it's impossible to please all the people, all the time. They recognize when their work sucks, and move on to more promising lives as forklift operators or pharmacist's assistants. They recognize, too, when their work has merit, but don't have unrealistic expectations of fame or fortune or breaking even.

The smartest ones of all move on entirely and accept the perfect nobility of a hobby while living their life for other, more important things. But the rest of us poor slobbs humiliate ourselves thinking an audience is more vital than food or normal relationships.

The problem is that writers are rendered invisible if nobody reads them. Yet, if anyone does read them, they are vulnerable. Writers stand stark naked before the world, with their every insight and conclusion and conviction up for public scrutiny. Every time we change our mind, our old opinions are forever frozen in Times New Roman. Our every emotion is exposed, but to omit our emotions and protect ourselves leaves our work lifeless and artificial.

Perhaps Kilodney 's years on the streets left him more vulnerable to rejection than most writers. The rejection of the public was a constant face-to-face confrontation, standing there as he did on the front lines of indifference and stupidity.

"The human race is like toothpaste," he wrote in the widely panned *Putrid Scum*. "One half of one percent is active ingredient, and the rest is filler... Stand on the street long enough and you will see the proof of it with your own eyes. Staggering stupidity and stereotyped behaviour are the norm, and this includes a large contingent of creatures so objectionable that one's gut instinct is to step on them like cockroaches."

Excrement and *Putrid Scum* are barely fictionalized chronicles of Kilodney's years peddling his chapbooks on Toronto's streets. Based on his diaries, this duo possibly delves more deeply and honestly into the "misunderstood writer" archetype than any other work ever has.

In perfect illustrative irony, the literary establishment neglected to recognize this accomplishment. It somehow failed to grasp the tragicomic perspicacity of these accounts. The Shakespeare included, these are, in my mind, far and away the Duke's most important legacy.

Those who dismissed them as whinging self-pity completely missed the point: *yes, precisely*. How could anyone be unmoved by the black humour of this anatomical dissection of the neurotic writer stereotype, doubling as an autobiography of one the most unusual literary figures of all time?

These books plunder man's search for meaning, articulating existential angst with less self-censorship than *American Psycho*. They waver between murderous rage and surprising vulnerability and softness. What other author has ever divulged with such ruthless honesty his interior scars?

Geist Magazine: "There are few rewards... in *Putrid Scum*, which is merely another boy's-rant-against-dull-sods disguised as autobiography. Kilodney, who has written some great stories in his long career bottoms out with this one. He needs an editor badly, very badly."

Ouch.

But *Geist* can't hold a candle to the astute analysis, the hilarious escapades, and the weight of the wallowing in these revelations. Who but Crad Kilodney, the Duke of Sherbourne, would have the audacity to tell it like it is?

"Wonder of wonders: I got to read at Harbourfront. (All the important writers were gadding about in the south of France or other exotic, far- off places, so I agreed to help fill a dead spot on the calendar) ... At the intermission, several people walked out... I received \$50 as a reading fee, which, to my knowledge, is the smallest fee ever paid to a writer at Harbourfront. If I thought reading at Toronto's foremost literary venue would have any impact on the real world, one day back on the street was enough to set me straight on that particular delusion."

"I looked out the window at the grey, grey, joyless city I'd come to, and wondered how long I could go on this way, and why was I treated this way when all I wanted to do with my life was write good books? When I got home. I took out my diary, and a revelation came to me, which I set down at once. *"Now I understand! My life is a satire of the life of a writer!"*

"From my satchel I produced all ice pick and shoved it up his nose. 'Die, you. bastard!' I yelled, as the blood gushed out."

"This teenager suddenly veers toward me and grabs my book. 'What the fuck is this?' 'It's my book... 'Is it like a fuckin' acid trip story, like?' 'No.' " ...You expect me to stand here and read this whole fuckin' hook'?" "I don't expect you to do anything. If you want to buy it. it's three bucks.' 'Three bucks? You're fuckin' crazy, man! I'd rather buy a pack of cigarettes. '"

"I poked his eyes out and knocked him down. As he screamed, I knelt on his chest and vomited into his open mouth."

"You look at the blank page and then you say to yourself. *You scum. You nothing. What makes you think you have anything to say that is of any value to the human race?* And then you leave the page where it is on the unpainted desk beneath the basement window that faces the brick wall of the house next door..."

"His chest split open, and a vast number of black worms oozed out - horrible things that fed on dead flesh ...I hacked his head clean off and kicked it into the gutter ...I sprinkled lighter fluid on his corpse and set fire to him..."

"And in the face of all you have seen, you force yourself to touch that page with a small piece of yourself in the hope of eliciting a human reaction in the mind and heart of another sentient being. You suspect that the whole business is ridiculous, absurd, and destined to be painful... "

"I looked at some notes for a story and felt sick... Later I put on a record that I knew would depress me and lay down in bed ... I reached over to the bookshelf beside my bed and felt the accumulated dust on the shelves on top of the books. *Books gathering dust. Me turning to dust. A whole life destined to become dust.* And I thought of all the book warehouses I'd worked in, with stacks and stacks of books gathering dust."

"His face... his face .. *I took the axe from under my coat and whacked him in the face, opening a huge gash from between his eyes to the side of his mouth...* "

"No doubt. it must be a tremendous advantage to have such control over one's emotions, but how could I become like that without becoming an entirely different person? . I envied people whose intellects were in control of emotions, because they weathered the storms of life more easily... *What is the correct way to be? How do you change what you are? What will become of me?*"



"Crad Kilodney, failed writer," reads my copy of *Girl on the Subway*.

In the. 1995 interview. *Eye's* Sid Hilderman refers, too, to Crad's career as "a decade-and-a-half of misery and failure," and bids farewell to the "bitter" writer. "As it turns out," Hilderman wrote, "not many of us checked out his work - and fewer of us bought his stories:"

John Copping from *What Magazine* also castigates Crad. " ...Junior high scatology ...racist asides ...a bizarre hybrid of comic book and hate literature... " (Later, Crad vented his wrath by writing a short story called *Who Is John Copping*")

The Globe and Mail referred to Crad's work as "angry, self-pitying bumph." (It's worth looking up what "bumph" means if you aren't sure.) Evelyn Lau of *Runaway*' fame called his work "preachy" and "pretty boring."

Overall, there was no shortage of disgust from the literary establishment. And the feeling was mutual.

Lit blogger "Thomas" wrote, "In the end, you can't help but wonder, if Kilodney had such a strong sense of mission, and took his art and his calling so seriously, why this seriousness wasn't reflected more in his writing. Most of it was funny, but in an adolescent way, wanting more than anything else, to shock the reader with its outrageousness."

"Crad is convinced that he's not responsible for his failure," Hildernan clucked, pointing out that placards like, "Books for uncultured swine" might have alienated the writer from a wider readership.

To be sure, public relations were never Kilodney's strong point.

But what should you do if you simply *can't* fake it? I would wager my personal library that Crad simply isn't capable of the phony pleasantries that might have made him palatable to a wider audience. He once said something to the effect that even when they try hard, people can only change a little bit. Many blame Crad's brisk personality on too many years on the street, on overexposure to humanity's lowest rungs. They surmise that the bitterness got the best of him. I think it was the other way around- that his born-this-way carapace made it possible to carry out his destiny on the front lines. "I've never been happy, so what?" Crad tells me.

To my surprise, he softens a bit. "Not everyone gets to be happy," he says. "But there's not much I regret, either, unlike most people. There's one decade I wish I could have back. That's it."

I can't help wondering if he laments the only period in which he wasn't producing much literature. But I don't ask this time. Suddenly, it doesn't seem right to pry.

Kilodney once referred to himself as a "cultural terrorist" and "Canada's foremost literary renegade." Here he made clear that he could never fit in among stuffy academics. So he carved out a wholly original literary career.

I think it was a stroke of brilliance for Crad to go with the obvious, maybe the only, option, rather than struggling to become chirpy just to placate us. Why not use one's genuine misanthropy as one's shtick? Then there would be nothing to hide or run from. Crad had said himself that his fate was spelled out before his reincarnation to this plane. can't help but think of a useful little phrase: *to thine own self be true*.

Had Mr. Kilodney penned decent, respectable how-to articles or pretty short stories, Crad would not be "the social misfit, neurotic and genius." That was from Crad's American friend, writer Richard Grayson, in his *Indian Summer: Park Slope 1985* diary. *West Side Summers* showed some frustration, too. Crad "rails against book critics, libraries and the general public for not seeing the merits of his work. I don't know; that stuff is really getting tired." But the journals more often show Grayson's admiration. In *South Florida Winters*: "When I compare myself... to Crad with his stubborn independence and refusal to submit to convention, I feel like an ass."

Grayson, who is a prolific, respected short story writer and a college lit prof running for Green Party presidential candidate, lost touch with his friend Kilodney a long time ago. When I ask him if he thinks Crad should have done things differently, he tells me, "Our greatest strengths are also our greatest weaknesses, and I guess that's true of Crad as much as you or me or the rest of human beings." Grayson says, "Crad Kilodney's books will and should last. I hope they are or will be available generally to the public for a long time to come ... He was an important writer to me."

Thank God for us that the Duke never became a "respectable" writer. What then?

He would not be the stuff of legend, the writer who vanquished the slush pile, the phoenix who rose above the steaming heap into unique notoriety, the inspiration to minions of misfit literary hopefuls, the ghost in the Charnel House machine, the author of *Bang Heads Here Suffering Bastards*, the author of *Pork College*. He would be nobody.



In a way, though, all of this misses the point.

Even Crad misses the point himself, in his self-deprecating inscriptions. Because despite the very real tribulations in his writing life; despite his diligent cultivations of the image of said misery; despite these wretched reviews; Crad Kilodney is not a "failed" writer.

The Cult of Crad is a significant slice of counterculture, even if he's not as famous as Shakespeare. As Crad muses frequently, a writer's books gather dust in warehouses and basements; there are no Kilodneys gathering dust. They are all out of print and collected and traded for wicked fees to those still hunting. For other writers' books, the untold quantities of unsold words are torn up and recycled by bookstores; even Well Respected Authors do not turn heads on the street. The vast majority of books by even the brightest literary lights are forgotten.

But who could forget a book called *Excrement* or *Lightning Struck My Dick*?

Nor do the Duke's cool credentials let up after a few clever titles. Decades after his heyday, bloggers point to Crad's bravado and his idiosyncrasies. Not long ago, a new convert named "Jeff" at *omphaloscafe.com* wrote, "You have earned the moniker of cultural legend." Jeff had recently found Crad's *Putrid Scum*. "Holy shite!" Jeff wrote. "The effrontery, the chutzpah, the balls to stand there and face the crass indifference of the million footed city!"

Crad is also memorialized on the cover of the legendary *Nerve* newspaper, long defunct, holding a sign that promised, "literature for mindless blobs." I would have had *Ay! Carumba* tattooed across my forehead to share that spot with up and coming superstar Matt Groening, who was then on the verge of unleashing *The Simpsons*, the greatest television show of all time. Crad didn't have to go to such extremes. He just had to show up. Immortalized forever alongside the inventor of Homer himself.

Thousands of respectable writers land mention in respectable papers. But few are referenced in cool books like *Rules of Attraction* by Bret Easton Ellis. The characters are talking about literature, and James Joyce and Crad Kilodney are the writers that come up in their conversation. We're talking here about Ellis, the author of *Less Than Zero*, of *American* freaking *Psycho*.

One uproarious 2004 Kilodney column listed a hundred names anyone could use for their band, "no charge." Some of the best options included Twinkie Holocaust, the Babyslitters, the Thrilling Root Canal, Gryzypnyx, Thorazine Budgie, Satan's Milkmaids, Voodoo Barbie, and the Suburban Chicken Stranglers.

The Suburban Chicken Stranglers was a reference to Crad's book, *Suburban Chicken Strangling Stories*. Unbeknownst to the Duke, there was a band by this name, a teen basement outfit from Belleville in 1997. They have wretched videos on You Tube. The lone comment enthuses, "I think you guys are going to make it. make it big!"

Back in the day, Crad was also the subject of a short film, *Crad Kilodney*, directed by Peter F. Glen. The film premiered at the prestigious Toronto International Film festival. How many writers have been the subject of films at the celebrity-dripping, wildly popular, highly respected Toronto International Film Festival? Despite the prodigious talents of creatives like yours truly, ahem, TIFF is the only real reason anyone outside of Ontario has even *heard* of Toronto. Critic Steve Munro called the short film "witty" and said, "A more succinct putdown of Toronto's pretensions is hard to find."

In the film, Crad reveals his early hopes and his subsequent disenchantment. "I started out with this idealistic view that the public was reasonably intelligent and that if a great idea were presented to them, they would respond," he says. "But I must say, that after fourteen years on the streets I've had all of my illusions about the public shattered."

The documentary immortalizes on celluloid the very essence of Crad, confirming what we suspect- the man writes to keep himself sane, to keep from plunging off the deep end into the plot lines he so carefully keeps fictional.

"I'm not sure that literature has the power to lift anyone out of anything or even have any significant impact on the real world. When I'm in a bad mood, I'm willing to say that writing is a sublimation for extreme hostility. I mean, really, what's the point of writing books? It would be more meaningful to go out on the street and just start slaughtering people."

After such cool brushes with the cream of pop culture iconography, and after such chilling pronouncements, it hardly matters that Crad Kilodney also turns up in discussion as a cultural icon in dozens of respectable books. Perhaps he longed for such merit and recognition, but no kids will ever name their band *Canada's Radical Poetries in English* or *The Encyclopedia of Canadian Literature*. Still, it's good to cover all your fan bases, and books like these, or Alana Wilcox et al's *State of the Arts: Living With Culture in Toronto*, can be enjoyed by perfectly serious people who also read the *Globe and Mail*.

Beyond all the cool, Crad has also sold an impressive number of books. Not counting the handful of traditionally published collections like Black Moss's *Malignant Humors* or Coach House Press's *Pork College*, Crad figures he sold at least thirty thousand copies of his books by hand. Writers drool for numbers like these. The average sales of a self-published book are well below two hundred copies each. And despite a few meteoric chart toppers to make the averages seem higher, most traditionally published books have a similarly dismal fate.

Sad but true, if you are a writer, statistics promise that you will very probably write for almost no one throughout your life. A few of us will have a few dozen readers and maybe even touch someone along the way. A few will win Big Important Prizes and still go bankrupt. There will always be the rare legacy-leavers like Shakespeare, but even most of these lived unrecognized and in poverty until becoming fashionable after their demise.

Any writer who sells thirty thousand copies of his books during his lifetime is a resounding success.

Even more important than all this selling is Crad's other legacy- his central role in Canada's indie author scene. Self-publishing is a longstanding tradition for writers, but Crad's one-man-show as writer, publisher, and marketer made a lasting mark on literature's DIY culture, Micro-press and zine revolution.

There were few predecessors to his street peddling work- only Vachel Lindsay comes to mind, the poet who travelled on foot from town to town like an itinerant preacher, bellowing early hip-hop/spoken wordstyle poems. (That this poet-preacher was the original forty-year-old virgin and died after imbibing Lysol spray is real life, not a plot from a Kilodney story!)

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and Crad helped spawn an army of micro-press copycats, hordes who took to the streets after him hawking their poetry and zines. Crad embodied the very meaning of the word "independent" in every conceivable way.

Joe Blades, now active in radio, art, film, and publishing, writes about Crad in *In the Dark: Poets and Publishing*. "When I walked up Yonge Street in Toronto, I would invariably run into Crad Kilodney (Charnel House Press) or Stuart Ross (Proper Tales Press), standing on the sidewalk selling their books to passersby ... I soon realized there was no point waiting for the hand of God to point at me and say, 'You, you are the next new poet.' .. I firmly believe that the author is the best promoter of their own writings ... "

Stuart Ross himself wrote in *Hey, Crumbling Balcony!* that after selling several copies of his first chapbook at the Axeltree Coffee Shop, Toronto's literary hotspot in the '80s, "... inspired by literary street vendors Don Garner and Crad Kilodney, I printed up 1000 copies ... and began selling my stuff on Yonge Street."

In turn, Ross is an incredibly influential writer, possibly the backbone or at least quite a few of the vertebrae- of Canadian small press publishing. He is well known in Canada's range of literary circles, having self-published dozens of poetry collections and moved into editorial roles for publications of all sizes. He co-founded the Toronto Small Press Book Fair, which inspired similar ventures in other Canadian cities. He has worked for *sub-Terrain*, a key literary journal, and currently edits fiction and poetry for the award-winning *THIS Magazine*. The devotion of his readers is remarkable- one fan declared online that Ross takes his place as master of short story alongside only Hemingway and Chekhov. (Ross told me not to take this flattery too seriously, but readers who have missed his fiction are indeed in for a treat.)

I tracked Ross down after rereading his *Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer*, which refers to Crad as "the grandfather of literary street vendors" and recounts Ross's own days on the beat, wearing snarky signs just like Crad did.

"He was important to me, as a model of DIY, and as a friend," Ross tells me. It was the late '70s. and Ross was already influenced, as a writer, by punk music. He and some friends were plotting guerrilla poetry and other acts of literary anarchy.

He says he would have self-published and found the small press world regardless, but Crad "inspired me to get out there and actually get in people's faces with my books: confront them with my weird literature right on the street."

Ross says, "I suspect he was a pariah in academic circles, and certainly commercial circles. and those are powers that determine lit-taste. But ... I think Crad inspired a lot of young people who were disgruntled about Can-Lit and had no interest in Alice Munro and Michael Ondaatje and the other superstars ... He was very encouraging of people involved in DIY ... he is and always has been a fan of the transgressive and of independent thought."

Ross and Kilodney are both cited as inspiration for writer Jay MillAr, who is also a staple of independent literature in Canada. He is head honcho at Book Thug, which publishes contemporary fiction, and he teaches at the Toronto New School of Writing that he co-founded. In a 2005 interview with rob mcLennan, Jay said, "I discovered all sorts of things, but most importantly I found Stuart Ross"

Proper Tales Press and Crad Kilodney's Charnel House ... these guys stood on the street hawking their books ... these presses told me that anyone could be a publisher if they wanted. Within a few months I had foolishly produced my first small press book... "

Another main ingredient in Can-Lit is the unstoppable Matthew Firth, famed for the independent journal *Front and Centre*, for *Suburban Pornography and Other Stories*, for his micro-press, Black Bile, and for his outspoken views on the limitations and pretension of too much in literature.

Firth tells me that Crad "is best remembered for being a cantankerous sod selling self-made books on the street. He influenced a whole generation of zinesters and micro pressers, of that there is no doubt."

A very old tidbit online cites Kilodney as Firth's number two reason for writing, the first being their pier the late Daniel Jones, I track Firth down to ask if the inspiration still stands. He confirms that the list is archaic, but nonetheless, Crad, "was a big influence on me as a publisher and writer when I started to take what I do more seriously, back almost twenty years ago now. Crad showed me that if you want to be a publisher, just call yourself a publisher and do it. Anyone can do it. And it's best to do it your way by doing it yourself on your own terms. That's Crad: a mix of determined, obstinate and direct. I started Black Bile Press in 1993 in large part because of him. Others too, mind you. But his press Charnel House was a major influence."

Firth explains that, like most writers, he was influenced by a broad spectrum of creative figures, but Crad's stories showed him that, "if you want to write fiction, write exactly what you want to write and don't compromise or dilute what you do."

Firth marvels that Crad's originality couldn't be pinned down- his work was, "horror, literary, surreal, downbeat," only to switch gears to something, "quietly beautiful." (Indeed, reader Julie Ann McGeorge remarked that Crad's collection, *Girl on the Subway*, was "surprisingly tender.")

"He showed many writers that it's okay to write honestly and to write about whatever screwball notions you might have for fiction," Firth continues. "He showed that it's okay to stray from the norm and that you don't have to take some insipid workshop or college course to become a writer _ it's all about a strong will and work ethic. He was an agitator. If he's regarded as important, it's for that reason: an agitator and a shit disturber. That and for coming up with some of the best titles for hooks."

Clearly, Crad inspired and empowered writers to take matters into their own hands and not wait for someone else to define them.

I'm one of them.

I'm a far more obscure talent than these major players, and I don't purport to think my words have or will change the face of literature, Canadian or otherwise, like Firth and Ross and MillAr. My poetry and fiction has been published widely, some of it alongside Firth and Kilodney (*Burning Ambitions. the Anthology of Short Shorts* edited by Debbie James), some of it in Firth's *Black Cat 115* lit mag, some of it in other reasonably important journals like *The Fiddlehead* and *Grain*. Perhaps my shining moment was when I was cover girl for the now defunct but quite influential *Quarry Magazine*.

And so what? Like everyone else I have my vanities and secret hopes.

But I have no delusions: beyond touching someone here and there or riling them lip there and here, my work will not matter tomorrow, and certainly it won't matter a hundred years from now.

But does it matter if it matters? Maybe, For as we discussed earlier, writing- and most kinds of creative work- isn't complete unless someone else sees it.

Or maybe what matters more is "to be or not to be." It is hardly recognition that makes one what you are; rather, it is what you do. You are what you do. Whenever someone asks me how I "became" a writer, I answer with the seemingly obvious, "by writing."

It's very simple, really. Should academia or Can-Lit or Oprah's Book Club decide for me whether or not I am a writer? Or, like Crad, should I decide that and be it for myself? When I was five, I was already calling in sick to school so I could stay home and type out short stories on a Fisher Price typewriter, occasionally coughing into a Kleenex to keep up appearances.

And that's what I'm going to keep on doing. The thing itself is what matters, that I spend my life doing my work, doing what I love.

When I first met Crad, I had just put out a poetry collection, independently. A good many of its poems had been published, maybe even most of them. But I didn't get any response to the collection as a whole, not even rejection. Just silence. I had worked in bookstores for much of my life and I knew that hardly anyone bought poetry anyways, so I thought it wouldn't matter who printed my book. So I did it myself.

Yes, it is vanity publishing, and so what? Is it more or less vain than someone else's affirmation? It was a thrill to have creative control, and I made an imperfect but very good little anthology. *The Astronaut's Wife: Poems of Eros and Thanatos* was divided into "love" and "death"- the great biblical, Shakespearian themes of literature. A few Important Best-selling Authors That I Personally Love praised it, and frankly, it was one of the best looking books of poetry ever. The cover was a painting of an astronaut by Iaian Greenon, the same artist who told me to write about Crad.

Like these aforementioned writers, by meeting the king of the DIY world in person it dawned on me that I could and should do anything I wanted. Crad was not my only influence. The fear of death was a bigger one. But he was pivotal nonetheless, especially to my independence.

Inspired by the Duke's resolve, I stopped floundering around looking for a better job. I was not suited to a better job, truth be told. I was only suited to working for myself: living for my work, spending every day as a writer and artist.

Perhaps my tiny flat and second hand rose life is not the paragon of success to some, but to whom does my life matter but me? I have a spectacular library of books and plenty of time to read them. I spend most of my time working on my visual art and my writing. I can't wait to get out of bed each and every day and get to work.

Not long ago, I merged my creative works under one umbrella, the Idea Fountain. I even made my tagline "fiercely independent." Maybe if I was a better writer or a better artist, I would be hunted down for major *Rolling Stone* features or New York City gallery shows and wouldn't have to worry about

money. But as it stands, the vast majority of writers and artists accept defeat and move on to Plan B. Not me. I'm going to spend as much of my life as possible doing what I love most.

Don't get me wrong, I won't be turning down any huge contracts. But rather than waiting around for "something to happen" I got right to the business of making it happen, to doing my work. I always had the DIY spirit; thanks to Crad, I decided not to change channels.

Crad's taste in literature and his work itself has little in common with my own, yet we do share a kinship in our delight of the absurd and in our attention to titles. My devotion to Kilodney is apparent in the title of my first collection of short stories, a title chosen in part as a tribute to his spirit: *Funny Stories About Depression*.

It's worth recounting the anecdote of why this particular collection is dedicated to a close friend. She "understands why I spend half my life waiting for the muse." This woman also wanted to be a writer. She's smart and funny and gutsy and would have made a great author. But she was one of the smart ones who relegated her writing to a hobby and accepted a life with different meaning and more money. She filed her stories away in a blue envelope, and worked like a dog to study risk management. Her textbooks may as well have been in Korean, but she deciphered, memorized, failed and tried again. Now she is a Businesswoman, with a laptop, pencil skirts, and a boardroom. And a big dog and a big kitchen and weekend trips to Moscow or the Tate Gallery in London. I. say go, girl! Rock that briefcase.

In turn, I appreciate that she accepts my lowly station in life without barking on about "getting it together." She hangs on my every word. She does not chide me when I call, humiliated, tail between my legs, to say I can't go shopping or out for fifteen dollar martinis unless she pays and that I'm out of cat food again.

I was speaking with another colleague the other day who had recently returned from travels in Asia. I've always been envious of the fact that this young woman has travelled the globe. She's ambitious and takes good jobs, and travels in her spare time. On the other hand, she wants to be an artist and writer and keeps asking me *how I do it*.

I. don't really understand the question. It's true that the two aren't necessarily mutually exclusive, but the percentage of writers or painters paid big bucks to travel to every corner of the world is slim indeed. Clearly how I do it is to sacrifice all the things that she has that I would like, because I like this more.

In *Putrid Scum*, the failed-writer-narrator's buddy says, "Listen, when you become a big-shit writer, you'll be getting invitations to read all over the country and in other countries too, and they'll offer you fees you can't refuse, so get used to the idea." Kilodney's writer admits that such a prospect was terrifying; he would be content just to get off the streets and, "deal with the outside world by mail."

He says he sometimes feels he's on the verge of a big break, but mostly worried that he's going to be on the streets selling his books for twenty years. And his friend says, "Listen, if you spend twenty years on the street peddling your books, you'll go down in history as a fucking literary legend in this country..."

Kilodney wrote *Putrid Scum* in 1991, over twenty years ago. Literary history has been made.



There's a scene in the Milos Forman masterpiece of cinema, *Amadeus*, where Salieri, a "failed" composer, recounts his jealousy and bewilderment to a priest. Despite his unfailing dedication and the sweat of his labour, in his struggle for artistic integrity and accomplishment, he felt doomed to a life without recognition. Salieri's nemesis, on the other hand, found easy brilliance and even easier popularity even though he was a scoundrel and a drunk.

Salieri dreams up a horrible plan of retribution when Mozart laughs at him. "Go on, mock me, Laugh," he says bitterly, telling the priest that it was actually God mocking him and his work as a musician. A plot is unfolding within him, one where he will "show" God.

"Go on, Signore, laugh, laugh." Salieri plans a terrible hoax where he will murder Mozart after taking the rogue's best work and passing it off as his own. "Show my mediocrity for all to see. One day, I will laugh at you. Before I leave this earth, I will laugh at you."

Salieri's hoax did not show God up or bring him the creative credibility he sought. He did not get to laugh. You cannot make a place for yourself by tearing down another's creative genius, not one like Mozart. in any case. But around two hundred years after Mozart's death, there was another man who questioned the judges of the established order, a man who did get the last laugh.

This man decided to perpetrate a hoax in order to laugh at the publishing industry and the self-appointed literary tastemakers. Fuelled by feelings of failure and by his inner prankster, Crad Kilodney decided to publicly mock the establishment. Crad's great hoax would show the world that the publishing industry was a farce that knew nothing about literature; he would prove to the world that they didn't know their arses from holes in the ground.

Kilodney packaged up poetry and short stories by top literary icons like Kafka. Hemingway, O. Henry, Faulkner, Jack London, and more, under pseudonyms such as Colonel Herman Mlunga Mbongo. He sent the manuscripts to a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation competition that had rejected his own stories. He sent the poetry of one of Canada's most famous poets, Irving Layton, to over twenty publishers.

So what happened? Kilodney made his point. Loud and clear. Not a single publisher accepted the work of the greatest writers in the world. All of it was summarily rejected across the board.

No one even accused Mbongo of plagiarism. No one recognized the works of Hemingway or Faulkner, of any of the other authors Crad used in his hoax. Irving Layton's own publisher, McLelland and Stewart, rejected their star poet outright.

Crad says only two editors from smaller presses caught on. He got a note from Michael Harris of Vehicule Press that was worth a smile. "Irving Layton, to whom I showed your manuscript, was as delighted as I was to see how useful his poems still are."

This incident cemented Crad Kilodney's place in literature, allowing him forever after to laugh if any snide editors or lit types sneered at him or at his work. The prank was proof indeed- "you don't know good literature when you see it."

This put Kilodney's name in print in those respectable papers he'd longed to be a part of. It earned him a spot in the *Encyclopedia Literature in Canada*.

Most importantly of all, he made the pages of *Weekly World News* in March, 1989, taking his rightful place among cannibals, fetus earrings, a red ghost on a camel, midgets, and a human vacuum cleaner.



Crad quotes Henry Miller in the opening pages of *Putrid Scum*, writing about writers. "He has not to think about literary standards ... he has only to deliver himself, naked and vulnerable ... he has only to give us, in his own language, the saga of his woes and tribulations ... who will print such books, who will publish and disseminate them? No one! You will have to do it yourself..."

I picked up *Tropic of Cancer* yesterday at Value Village, thinking I owed it to my subject to reconsider the work of his favourite writer and inspiration. I'm sure my views won't make me more popular, but I simply can't be dishonest: after rereading the book for half the night, I still can't for the life of me figure out how Miller once got praised as the "greatest living author." That he garners puffy adulation from so many is truly beyond me.

Shakespeare is not my cup of tea, yet I willingly acknowledge him as my literary master. But Miller gives no insight, despite his reputation, into life or into women whatsoever. Though I disagree heartily with Miller's fashionable disdain for American "consumerism," his book *The Air Conditioned Nightmare* nonetheless proves that he is quite capable of beautiful prose. This makes it all the more infuriating that such nonsensical prattle in the "tropics" could qualify as masterpieces. In these, it appears he is not capable of writing a sentence, never mind depth or wit.

It proves once again that the whole game is subjective. Don't think I'm afraid of the word "cunt" or of hookers, either. Never have been. I'm not much of a lady.

I enjoyed photographer Brassai's writing about Henry Miller's adventures much more than I enjoyed Miller's own; I enjoyed Brassai's photos of Parisian underground much more than Miller's accounts of the same nightlife. Nor am I alone. One man online wrote that the *Tropic of Capricorn* was "absolute shite. Seriously. It's written by a retard." Critic Tim Taylor said, "Controversial doesn't always mean interesting."

One of Miller's lovers was writer and eroticist Anais Nin, and both of them were admirers of Dostoevsky for the depth of the people he wrote about. Nin lauds Miller's writing in a 1934 preface to *Tropic of Cancer*, declaring, "it is blood and flesh which are here." But her character in the film *Henry and June* was not so forthcoming. Nin cuts him up by saying his work is lifeless. "I wanted Dostoevsky," she rails. "You didn't give me Dostoevsky."

Poor Miller. He would never deliver Dostoevsky.

Nonetheless, his army of fans was legion, my personal taste inconsequential in the matter, as it should be. And Miller's biggest fan is Crad Kilodney. I don't expect Crad to be impressed by the fact I find his work superior to his hero's. "I'd spent an entire year reading nothing but Henry Miller," Crad wrote in *Putrid Scum*. "When I read Miller, I felt as if every cell of my body was charged with a mysterious force. A single paragraph could put me into such a rapture ... This was the kind of writer I wanted to be. But even his least significant books seemed vastly beyond my capabilities."

Perhaps. But some of Kilodney's readers beg to differ.

"There's a febrile quality to the story that reminds you of Dostoevsky," wrote "Thomas," concerning the previously mentioned masterpiece, *I Chewed Mrs. Ewing's Raw Guts*. He also wrote that Crad's work, "has none of Miller's messy, vacuous philosophizing." Seven years after Thomas's piece, the same unknown writer who was bored by Miller would compare the Kilodney's *Raw Guts* piece to Shakespeare.

My adulation may be a little over-the-top. I confess I'm prone to bursts of unbridled enthusiasm. Still, a very important kernel of truth lies in these comparisons: Beyond Kilodney's bravado and balls, his DIY originality, his hermit in the attic persona, his filthiest tidbits, and his rants about mutants, immigrants, derelicts, and winos, Crad is not a novelty writer. He is not, as he claims, a "failed writer." He is a very, very good writer. I would say a genius, and I would not be alone.

"There's a twisted genius living in Toronto who deserves to be widely read and anthologized," said *The Mill's* Richard Peabody. The University of Toronto paper said he was "like Woody Allen on Quaaludes." *Small Press Review* called Crad a "mad scientist/sociologist." *Books in Canada* affirmed that he is "a literary anarchist." His friend Richard Grayson said. "The only predictable thing about Crad Kilodney's writing is that it's bound to be excellent."

In Grayson's ancient journals he wrote, "There is no doubt that Crad is a one-of-a-kind genius; his work is hysterically funny, satirical, and also wise." Gwendolyn MacEwen, winner of the prestigious Governor General's award for poetry, said. "One of the finest and most original writers of prose in this country. Even 'original' is too weak a word to describe this phenomenal and much overlooked literary figure in our midst."

Perhaps the most astute commentary came from Crad's colleague and the literary superpower W.P. Kinsella, whose classic baseball book *Shoeless Joe* brought sixty-five million dollars into the box office when it was made into the film *Field of Dreams*. "From the disgusting and mundane he produces little gems of literature as dangerous as razor blades," Kinsella stated.

Crad does not believe in censorship, self, polite society, government, or any other kind, but in artistic license and free enterprise. And so he goes where no man has gone before. But the work's merit is not about "shock value" even though there's plenty of that. It would be easy to write down all kinds of obnoxious, hostile things with no literary value. Crad's work, on the other hand, is about love and death, about loneliness and alienation, the greatest themes in literature from Shakespeare to the Bible, non? And the detailed accounts of gore and feces are their own mark of courage.

In Kilodney's work you find the heart laid bare. His writing reflects the depths to which all men can sink, but Crad alone among us had the courage to put its ugliness unedited onto the page. I won't argue

that it's "right" to feel that all of your brothers and sisters are grunting subhumans or "chattering monkeys." Or that it's right to fantasize about slaughter every time some moron doesn't understand your writing.

But putting it on the page forces readers to confront our own unspeakable caves of wretchedness, to feelings that may not be "right" but are irrational, depraved, and real.

Crad exposes all of it with searing honesty, skewering himself publicly on a bed of coals with his unpardonable ideas. In a way, he takes the blame for us, for all of us who self-righteously deny relating to what he is saying. For we all know what he's saying. We all wrestle with isolation, with hatred, with questions of oblivion.

"The snowflakes whipped past the street lights, ...like so many lives blowing past into oblivion ...here and gone in a blink of cosmic time ...I walked past houses that didn't know me, past trees that didn't know me, beneath a vast, swirling black mysterious sky that didn't know me. And I prayed to any god who might happen to be listening to give me the courage someday to write about all these things."



It is not only Crad's courage, nor his characters' ruthless rage, that makes him a genius, however. It is his humour, aptly described by Kinsella as "razor" sharp,

Kilodney's humour is in a league of its own. The randomness, the satire, the keen sense of the absurd, the unfiltered powers of observation that catalogue the basest of human experience- plus, what he borrows literally and liberally from the slush piles and vanity press pages- these are the things that merit his rank among the most uproarious talents of all time.

Crad's reign is over the refuse heap of society, despite his fear and loathing of the lowly. He plucks gems and glittery tinfoil straight off the manure pile of mankind, gleaning gleaming treasures from the sheer absurdity of humanity. His tales come from all manner of religious tracts, news articles, pulp fiction, UFO books, conversations with dogs, advertising, pornography, mailing lists, academic websites, and television.

"People would be astounded to know how much of what I write is based in reality, based on a true story," Crad tells me.

Just as he would use real names of random people, or people he didn't like, in his sex advice columns- *Dear Pastor Kilodney* or something in this vein- Crad also derives his names by plucking them from political or celebrity sources, from academic sites, and from random populations.

Once I received a note from a peer saying, "I didn't know you had a sold out book signing in Paraguay!" Neither did I, my friend, neither did I.

But behind the wit and the, OMG, I can't believe he said that!" factor, there lurks wisdom, disguised as wisdom often is, with porn, aliens, vomit, and television. Few writers would consider a title like *Foul Pus From Dead Dogs*. Crad's work strains the limits of vulgarity, to put it mildly. But like those reality

TV shows in which people eat slime, We are compelled to see how far we can push ourselves into his abyss. Crad's readers are in collusion with him We want to see how low we can go.



Literature classes today discuss morality and spirituality in works by Dante or Dostoevsky. They consider man's search for meaning in works by Shakespeare or Camus or Kafka; they discuss nihilism and the disintegration of the American dream in Fitzgerald. They discuss the quest for truth or for eternal life in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* or Homer's *Odyssey*.

One day, Can-Lit students will write papers on a man named Johnson's quest for a "Horrible, Horrible Salami"- "the foulest salami known to man."

Or perhaps they will choose to mine stories like "Somalian Pee Pee Car" for symbolism and metaphor. "The land of Somalia is a happy, carefree land, despite the absence of plumbing," Kilodney writes, a fine segue into a vast array of opportunities for critical analysis. *Suburban Chicken Strangling Stories* also features dynamite works like, "Spiritual Preparation for Castration" and "Nazi Nuclear Power Plant Janitor Dog." Oh, and a story about a judge who fucks chickens.

Poetry majors may prefer to dissect existential angst. in "The Uncertainty of the Poet" from "Advanced Oboe Problems," a story from *Malignant Humors*. "The poet laureate of Radford, Virginia, looked over her typewriter out her window and saw the cows coming down from the mountains. A little shepherd boy was leading them, playing an oboe, which he had made himself from primitive materials according to gypsy traditions. His gentle melody inspired the poet, who began to write... "

After some insipid lines of poetry that truly capture the vast majority of wasteful Canada Council expenditures, the Duke writes, "The poet left her typewriter and went into the bathroom. Which of the following kinds of lines occur in the above text: amphibrach, choriambic, dactylic, anapestic, trochaic, iambic, detersive? How would you compare the poet's style to that of Homer, or Robert Lowell, or Edgar Guest? How are we to interpret the poet's belief that the oboe will shine tomorrow?"

(Incidentally, this sizzling trinket is part of the story that also reads, "Tired of missing out on hot action? NOW GET GIRLS by playing the oboe!" and "A dead body is found wrapped in a sheet in a Turkish bath, with an oboe next to it. Explain. ")

Insightful Ph.D. candidates will note that the overarching theme in all of Kilodney's work is the sheer inanity of existence. Such gross banality pervades his stories. "A commercial for tires came on," reads one tidbit in *Bang Heads Here Suffering Bastard*. Or, "His daydreams were shattered, his career apparently cut short. All those years of work to write *Peat Mosses of Canada*..."

Along the way, we encounter characters like Mr. Kent, an "expert on dung beetles," or Mr. Hayman, President of Dynamic Media Communications, Limited. The divine comedy, indeed. Over and over again, Crad shows us our Everyman, in all of his absurd, pathetic, meaningless glory.



Enter one such character. this time named Mr. Duggins, stage left. Duggins' hails from one of Crad's classics, Black Moss Press's *Girl on the Subway*.

Being a selection from A Respectable Canadian Publisher, editors ferreted out some of Crad's more heinous moments and highlighted stories of deep psychological insight. (They did include a story about a man taking jars of excrement to the garbage, however, not wanting to depart too far from Kilodney's reality.) The collection's most sublime story is, "The Simplified Existence of Mr. Duggins." This story was adapted to the stage as a play and performed in British Columbia by Theatre Bombus in 2009.

Here, Crad is twenty years ahead of the cult of contemporary asceticism, which requires not self-flagellation or worshipful prostrations, but the promise of righteousness and redemption if only one uses as few resources as possible. It's not just indulgence and excess that proponents of this faith decry, but every molecule of H₂O. every inch of space a human takes up, never mind the use of the fruits of human progress.

In this form of spiritual anorexia, one competes for moral superiority through personal cap and trade points. You cannot hold your head up in polite society if you confess to breathing even your own fair share of oxygen.

You most certainly cannot celebrate how technology, specifically fossil fuels, have rescued and can rescue more humans from abject slavery. Most certainly you cannot admit that you enjoy convenience and entertainment. You must profess to be a slave to pop music or television.

Kilodney lampooned this kind of pathological amaterialism in Mr. Duggins' slow and purifying suicide as he recedes from an ordinary fellow into nothingness and thus, enlightenment.

I shan't give too much away, but the story is kindred to Krakauers *Into the Wild*, a story that tragically illustrated how fear of consumption plagued a sensitive and promising young man to his very death.

Both Chris McCandless- the real boy- and Kilodney's Mr. Duggins read *Walden* and tried to avoid the unbearable weightiness of being. They both became sure that they would be poisoned by "society" and the accumulated burden of evil possessions. Krakauer's 1996 book was a true story and so it was not funny, and yet Mr. Duggins' demise is hilarious because it is "true."

"After all, the middle of the word enlightenment was lighten, and that's what he was doing with his life," muses Duggins as he freezes in an unheated apartment even though he can afford one with a furnace and electricity. Before finding the courage to abandon his comfortable home, Duggins was plagued by what a hippie had told him about simplicity making you free.

He "slept badly that night in his soft, warm bed, thinking about the horrible dead things that cluttered his life but wondering at the same time whether he could change himself for the better."

The story kicks us where it counts, because everyone has loved a hippie named Ray. Who hasn't tried to be worthy or pure by purging himself or herself of comfort or luxury?

"The Simplified Existence of Mr. Duggins is one of Kilodney's finest moments. That said, I doubt Crad will be happy with my interpretation: he will dislike phrases such as "spiritual anorexia." He'll say I'm reading too much into it.

Still, I'm not the one who dreamed up Mr. Duggins, the man who "couldn't even visit his maiden aunt in Niagara Falls without taking two suitcases."



Perhaps the author's experience writing for "men's magazines" was good practice for getting past the mores instilled by polite society.

"When may a lady of breeding sit upon a gentleman's face?" for example, is the opening to an essay in *The Orange Book* on sex advice. As it turns out, we find out near the end of some helpful instruction that "it is no longer regarded as good manners for a woman to hold a man's penis when walking with him during the day."

Good to know.

Touching sensitivity occasionally surprises, *Cathy* is one such story, and the author claims it as a personal favourite. There are no references on the back cover to devil worship or chicken love or chain saws. Rather, the blurb refers to "a young man's love for an ex-mental patient." Both parties struggle for meaning and purpose. "Their story is an emotional one, told with realism and simplicity."

Still, the Duke's genius is most at ease hiding behind crass satire. "Filling orders in Albania/It's a new kind of mania/Filling orders in Albania/Quack, quack, quack" (from "Filling Orders in Albania" in *Gainfully Employed in Limbo*.)

There's more wonderful banality to be found in *The Orange Book*: "Beans and Binoculars: Youth Speaks Out." Here, the writer shares riveting letters, such as this from Una D'Allessandro, aged nine. "If somebody steals your binoculars and you don't know their name, you will not get your binoculars back."

Fast forward a couple of decades and we get to Crad's blog at www.cradkilodney.wordpress.com, to the travelogues about exotic cities like Mogadishu, like Vinh, like Elbason, Albania, and other places Crad has never been.

"Not far from the Verena is the Choibalsan Music Hall. The Mongolian heavy metal rock band Hurd was in town, so I went. I have no idea what their songs are about, but they were loud, and they threw pieces of raw meat at the audience. Hurd will be coming to Canada in April of 2010 for a tour of the Atlantic provinces, and Rita MacNeil will be opening for them."

The *Exotic Cities* comeback set was pure inspiration. Kilodney was on a roll, splitting sides at every turn. Indeed, the smash series turned into that book the Duke promised we would never have. In French

only, suckers! In April 2012, France's Editions Le Dilettante (ledilettante.com) published *Les Villes Bigrement Exotiques*.

"Une irresistible pochade, terriblement incorrecte," wrote Christian Authier at *Le Figaro Littéraire*. "Une chronique simple et juste de l'immigration européenne aujourd'hui," said Bertrand Guillot at the *Standard*.

Everything that followed The Duke's "retirement" was gold, including the following snippets of philosophy, and right up until today's three-quarters complete *Shakespeare for White Trash*.

"Martin Heidegger loved pickles..." Only sour ones, of course: "Sweet pickles are for wimpy Canadians, who just sit there and say, 'Oh, dear!' if someone is being beheaded on a Greyhound bus."

"Gottfried Leibniz could have been many things - a carpet salesman, tuba player, astrologer, wrestler, ship captain, or even a cake decorator. Instead, he chose to become a philosopher. And the world is not any worse for it."

"Immanuel Kant was a typical philosopher who wrote long, boring books and never had sex in his entire life."

"Schopenhauer regarded Hegel as a phony, and he couldn't understand why Hegel's lecture hall was always full, while his own was practically empty. What he didn't know was that Hegel had arranged secretly for a woman with big tits to attend his lectures, knowing that all the male students would show up just to look at her."

"Spengler's landlady in Munich used to refer to him as 'The Sad Marsupial of German Philosophy' because he carried his books and personal effects in a pouch around his stomach and always had a gloomy expression..."

These daffy gems of flapdoodlery are from *The Roots of German Philosophy* series. Malapropist acrobatics and punnery soften the blows as Kilodney dismantles every reverent notion humanity has ever held.

By now we know that Kilodney does not believe in sacred cows.

But here, he butchers those we kept as pets and feeds 'em to us raw, with a side of sherry.



"You're trying *way* too hard to be literary," Crad tells me, holding my book *Funny Stories About Depression* in his hand. I brace myself for critical expletives, but I'm honoured to see that the Duke has penciled some comments onto a scrap of paper. He really took the time to read my little stories!

There are landmark occasions when it dawns on you that you are a Real Writer, and this is one of them.

But then, "I never want you to use the word 'quotidian' again," he orders. "Promise you won't. And what's this title? 'Anhedonia'? I don't even know *what that means*. Anti-hedonism?"

I want to curl up and die. I want to get out that chainsaw or ice pick or hand grenade and whatever else Crad mentioned in *Excrement* and *Putrid Scum* when people didn't understand his work. I want to point out that clearly, the riffraff of Yonge Street are not the only illiterates among us.

Dare I mention that one need not be a psychiatric nurse to know that *anhedonia* means "the inability to feel or experience pleasure"? I want to hold up a mirror before my critic and holler, "Behold! Here's your *anhedonia*!"

"'Marie Gets a New Hat.' A good, simple story," he goes on. "Best of the lot."

I grimace. My personal feelings place "Marie" as the weakest in the collection. To my horror, I didn't notice until after publication that I used the word "fetching" twice in the final paragraph.

"I didn't get 'The Owl and the Pussycat' at all. I mean, what is this? This opening? I don't even know where I am. I'm totally lost. All this abstraction of language. It's terrible. Just terrible stuff."

It's irrelevant, I know, to point out that a Very, Very Famous Writer praised this exact story to no end. Or that in fact it merited from her the word "superstar" in prediction of the direction my short story writing career was headed. The Duke, as we have seen, doesn't give a rat's ass what Very Famous Writers think.

Still, "The Owl and the Pussycat" is by far the best story in the book, the most profound, the most poetic.

The axe handle pushes itself of its own volition into my curled lip palm and adrenaline surges over me as I raise it up over my head then down, down, down, smattering something not quite human into smithereens...

I say nothing. Crad fiddles with his spectacles and stuffs his pipe with Sail tobacco. " 'The Darkest Room.' Not a bad story, actually, but what the hell is the meaning of the title? It relates in no way to the subject matter. Abstraction, again. Too literary. Too obscure."

It... says.... right... there... in... the story ... the darkest room is explained clearly to anyone who can read the chainsaw comes alive, thrumming with the pent up furv of a thousand rejections, an apt metaphor for my manic...

" 'Life of a Salesman,' I don't get this one at all. ... what's it even about?"

But Mr. Choi feels the passion of classical music like you supposedly do! Remember? You wanted to know about culture, you were "inspired" by culture. you were so very moved by concerto number seven hundred and seventy two ... The pistol, she cannot help herself she cannot stop fate's terrible tumble...

"I just never have any idea what you're talking about," Crad drones on. "I simply don't buy this Japanese exchange student story. I don't buy it. What would she want with this old man?"

I want to crawl into a gutter and disappear forever.

"I like 'Clean,' however," Crad says then, surprising me, since it's the most tender, most emotional story in the book. "I also like the resurfacing themes of the struggles between religion and reality and it's brave to use these two narrative viewpoints in 'Clairsentience' in general, actually, I think it's a brave book overall."

The knife drops. The ice pick clatters into a dusty corner. He called me brave! He called my Works of Literary Art brave!

"It's a very solid first collection," he says. He pats the cover. "A very good first collection indeed,"

"Well, it's not Chekhov," I giggle to make light of things, pushing my silly little book away self-consciously, out of sight, out of conversation, wanting to leave the conversation on a note of faint praise.

Crad scowls. "No, it certainly is not," he says. "Chekhov is the greatest short story writer of all time." I sip nervously at my zinfandel. "He's unsurpassed. I expect you've read him?"

I gesture with relief at my copy of *The Lady With the Little Dog and Other Stories* and he nods a curt approval. I don't tell him that I acquired the book out of guilt after I read his story, "No Chekhov at Yorkdale."

In this particular slice of understated wit, the narrator says, "Reader, before you die, you must see to it that you spend one rainy day doing nothing but reading the stories of Anton Chekhov. When you are on your deathbed you will perhaps remember that day and be comforted. You may even be lucky enough to have your book of Chekhov stories with you on your deathbed so you can reread them."

This narrator decides to head to the Yorkdale mall to pick up a new collection and finds nary a copy. "For \$25.99, you can have a set of three nickel-tungsten darts at Hobby Hut. ... an 'electric deodorant diffuser' ... you can buy Wayne Gretzky's videotape *Hockey My Way* ... But if Anton Chekhov came back from the dead to see for himself how the future had unfolded, he would not find a single one of his books anywhere in the Yorkdale Shopping Centre."

You can buy four grams of bay leaves, and Madonna on cassette, cameo chocolates at Laura Secord, and "156 different kinds of shampoo." But "no amount of wishful thinking will get you any edition-hardcover or paperback- of stories by Anton Chekhov, the son of a small shopkeeper and grandson of a serf, holder of a medical degree and winner of the Pushkin Prize in 1888..."

It was after reading this story a few years ago that I went out on a rainy day and picked up this copy of *The Lady With the Little Dog*. I had read a handful of stories some years ago both in and out of the classroom, but after reading Kilodney's story, I felt: it was not enough.

Now we sit here discussing Shakespeare, the short story, the intrinsic flaws in my own prose, and the lack of Chekhov in Toronto. Forget the pensive editorial comments, the intermittent acceptance slips, forget even the cheques, small but important, forget the poetry readings, forget the hundred and something little literary magazines that feature my work, forget meeting Margaret Atwood, forget the

signed copy of Ray Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine*, forget the gruelling years of doing j-school while clinically depressed and certifiably manic.

Forget all that. *This is it*. This is the real deal, this right here. Two writers. Crad with his pipe, me and my pink wine.

It is true that most writers, even the best, will be relegated to obscurity. It is only persistence, consistency, and a series of chances that keeps you in the game.

Shakespeare himself may well have disappeared forever after the coins were laid on his eyes. It was a series of chances that preserved his work. And now, by chance again, one of the most unusual writers of all time has found inspiration therein and embarked on his opus and revival, *Shakespeare for White Trash*.

I am glad that Kilodney has left a perfectly esteemable paper trail with his thirty anthologies, and that now he is dipping into the cyber universe where no fire or basement flood can erase him. And I'm glad Crad liked a couple of my short stories,

But in the end, whether you are Shakespeare or Nobody, for a writer, it's the work that counts most. Oh, how we long to be read, now and forever, but I conclude that what has to count most is what you do with your life, not who reads you after you're dead. I vow here and now to hold nothing back, to stop whining over what does or doesn't happen, and just keep spending as much of every day as I can writing or painting and nothing else. And let the chips fall where they may.

That's what Crad's going to do, too. More monsters, more depraved lawyers, more making fun of celebrities. "I'm going to write a very controversial piece about Lady GaGa," Crad informed me some weeks ago. Would I be willing to run it as a guest post on my blog?

Sure I would, I'd told him. Even though I like Lady GaGa well enough. I think it takes big balls to live such a theatrical, costumed life. And I love the song "Poker Face." But I was certainly eager to see what the Duke would do to her.

Later, I checked in on the article and he said he had changed his mind. "Ah, Crad, you're not going soft on me, I hope?"

He said he'd been offended that such an insipid songstress had acquired so much filthy lucre only to squander it to bankruptcy. But then, he'd thought, she was in her early twenties. So she'd been stupid with her money. So what! What business was it of his?

The Duke is softening like butter.

But it's not so much that, I know. It's the drive to plow through this rigorous oeuvre without petty distractions. Kilodney simply can't waste any hours on petty mockeries when he is toiling through the most vital project of his life. Secondary, tertiary, fluffier projects can wait until later.

He wants to make sure he has completed the whole Shakespeare library before anything happens to him. He is driven. He can leave no play unturned.

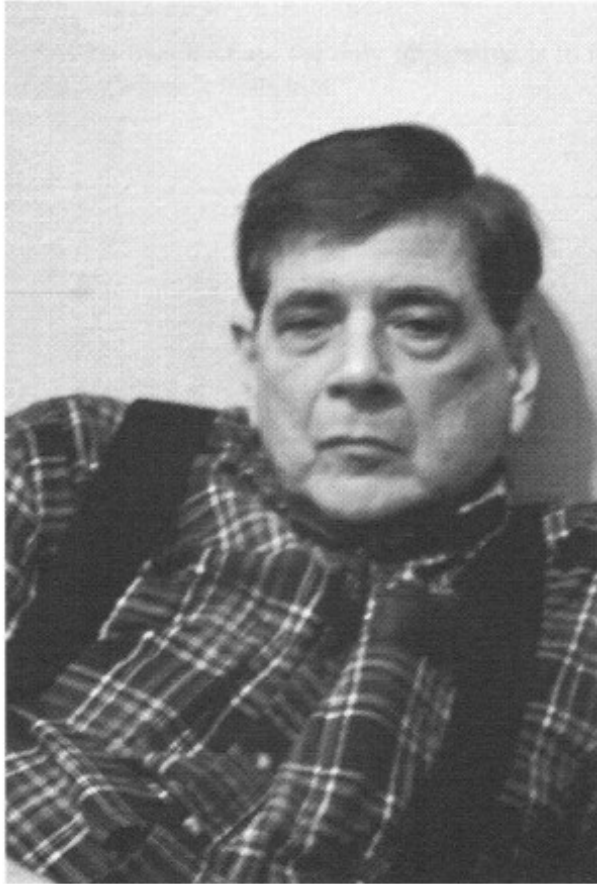
I don't think Crad Kilodney was expecting a personal resurrection beyond a few silly notes and some logic puzzles. I think he meant it when he promised he'd never throw another pearl before the swine.

And I wager that as he approached the other side of the hill, it was a pleasant surprise to discover that he was just waking up, that he had only just begun the best of his work.

The Duke may have even smiled, privately, of course, at the moment of this little epiphany.



The End



“Every man has his own destiny: the only imperative is to follow it, to accept it, no matter where it leads him.”

Henry Miller

About the Author



Artist and author Lorette C. Luzajic has been called "the worst writer in the world." But those who like her, like her a lot. She has worked as a barista, gas station attendant, psychic, sex phone operator, drug dealer, panhandler, zine hawker, stuffed animal duster, and more respectably, for over a decade as a bookseller. Today she writes and paints full time, although she secretly cleans toilets on the side. Her books include *Dendrite Pandemonium*, *Funny Stories About Depression*, *Fascinating Writers*, and a coffee table book of her visual art, *The Incomplete Works of Lorette C. Luzajic*. She has also written poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction for dozens of print and online anthologies, journals, and magazines, including *Wonder Café*, *Book Slut*, *White Wall Review*, *Rattle*, *Grain*, *Modern Poetry*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Adbusters*, *Zygote*, *Urban Graffiti*, *Canada Free Press*, and more. She is a regular contributor of art stories at sublimerush.com and artnectar.com. Her own manic depressive mixed media artwork has recently been exhibited at the Toronto Public Library, Susan Kristjansson Gallery in Sarnia, Cooper's Fine Art Gallery in Toronto, the 12X16 Gallery in Portland, Oregon, and the Royal Ontario Museum.

Visit Lorette at ideaofountain.ca or email her at ideaofountain@hotmail.com.

About the Artist



Tyler Landry is a constipated illustrator.

He cut his teeth doing gig posters for youth clubs, and has since done several album covers and posters for bands like *The Liquid Vapours* and *Barabas*.

In 2009, he released *The Book of Clav* with literary-partner-in-crime, Scott Lambridis. The two continue to collaborate on *Oh, Mighty Hiccup!*, currently an online serial, but destined for hard-copy publication, as well as many of Scott's short stories, including *Life of the Gallows* and *Devils, Devils, Everywhere*.

He exhibited paintings in various art galleries, most recently *Out of Purgatory*, a group show at Confederation Centre of the Arts, for which he also designed promotional materials.

Tyler currently serves as Art Director at EA Mobile's Bight Studio in Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Follow Tyler's semi-regular illustration projects at clavcity.blogspot.ca and clavcityalley.blogspot.ca.

"This girl was born to write, and she writes as well as I do." *Crad Kilodney*

Once upon a time, in a place very far away, the mad scientists of the divine comedy had a particularly delicious idea. And so they appointed one Mr. Name Withheld to be sent to earth to become Crad Kilodney, King of the Ill. Kilodney would create some of the strangest, sickest, and funniest literature in the history of the cosmos. For twenty years, he stood on the streets of Toronto, hawking masterpieces like *I Chewed Mrs. Ewing's Raw Guts*, *Blood Sucking Monkeys From North Tonawanda*, and *Putrid Scum*. Before Kilodney disappeared from the streets, he influenced generations of writers with his do-it-yourself ethos and dozens of cult classic titles.

Kilodney resurfaced a decade or so later with an obscene series of travelogues that would kick-start his resurrection. At the time, he had no idea he was about to embark on the most ambitious project of his life, rewriting the entire library of William Shakespeare's plays as *Shakespeare for White Trash*. Lorette C. Luzajic decided to ask him where he had gone, why he came back, and what possessed him to take on an opus of this magnitude. These meandering, often personal reflections run the gamut from hilarious to heartbreaking, as Luzajic reflects on Kilodney and his work, Shakespeare and Chekhov, on creative passion, and the absurdity of life. It is also the story of what Luzajic learns from Kilodney on what it means to be a writer.

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